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Africa on the Move

Excerpt:

Africa's Future and the World



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1. African reality

Subjective interpretations are at the root of one of the profound misconceptions that prevent a true understanding of Africa's problems and the concerns and activities of her peoples. For the interpretations made by foreign "specialists" in African affairs are as a rule based on the conditions of their own social milieu, and thus take little account of the specific conditions of the various African societies. If the problems of Africa are to be understood, analysed and solved, we must take into consideration the historical, economic, social, moral and cultural conditions which shape Africa's particular identity in the world – elements of the African evolution, in which total emancipation of the African peoples remains the main objective.

An attempt to solve specific African problems out of context, according to some half-understood universal concept, neglects the especially important social factors. Such an approach assumes that science has reached its limits, that mankind's present knowledge is absolute and immutable, and that in these matters there is nothing further to be expected, attempted, or desired. It implies that human society, having reached maturity, begins to decline. On the contrary, everything indicates that it is still full of contradictions and imperfections and that these are the causes of its difficulties, its crises and its disequilibrium. Thus the cause of progress, far from being limited, is infinite in time and space.

It is absurd to suppose that an American labourer can think and act in the same manner as the president of a great New York bank. It is just as absurd to conceive of an African or the African nations acting in terms that are supposed to be universal but actually are only relative, depending on particular historical or social conditions.

There are no simple solutions to human problems, nor will there be while vast differences in living conditions keep peoples apart, while agricultural and industrial over-production constitutes a permanent problem in the most highly-developed nations, and while a tragic lack of consumer goods and equipment remains a serious peril for the peoples of the underdeveloped nations. Poor peoples, underdeveloped nations, have needs and demands which have nothing in common with those of the

highly developed nations and their rich populations. It is not strange that all peoples want security and seek to improve their standards of life, for man's universal aspiration is for progress, social justice, freedom, prosperity and peace. But each of these aspirations has a particular order of urgency for each people, and draws on infinitely varied potentialities and capabilities.

Because of their historical past and their present state of underdevelopment, Asians and Africans obviously have more in common with one another than with Europeans. However, it is not from this point of view and with these given facts that we must study the problems posed by the relationships between peoples if we wish to avoid emphasizing the rift in the world and increasing the imbalance which already exists in society. These problems, it need hardly be emphasized, concern all peoples, nations and individuals, powerful or weak, rich or poor.

Hence it is pointless to expect the African farmer, with his rudimentary tools, his pathetically inadequate productive capacity and his miserable living conditions (all of which may be interesting from an exotic point of view but in human terms are tragic) to think and act like a factory owner. And it is pointless to expect the Guinean wage-earner, whether white-collar or factory worker, to think and act like a General Motors employee or like a worker in a metallurgical combine in a socialist country. In different social conditions, the same words refer to different realities, and these differences sometime are very great. But to infer thereby that nations cannot understand each other does not advance the solution of the problem one iota. The fact that African crows are black with a white collar does not keep them from being crows, any more than the green plumage of Africa's pigeons keeps them from being pigeons. To understand both the language of Africa and its true contents we must seek to find in its words, expressions, formulations, not the abstract character of a dialectic, but the substance and reality of the life they express. This life is made up of human imperatives, social demands and vital material needs; and these become increasingly explicit and urgent as the awareness of the African peoples develops and is able to measure the social injustice that characterizes their human condition.

The poor and underdeveloped countries are confronted with vital needs, great hopes and situations which bear no relation to the preoccupations of the highly developed and prosperous countries.

That all peoples should want security and better conditions is not abnormal, for man's true and universal aspirations are those relating to progress, social justice, liberty, prosperity and peace. However it must be pointed out that although each of these aspirations has a universal character, it may hold a different place for each people in their orders of priorities and bring into play different potentialities,

different qualifications and different responses to action. This is precisely the case in the former colonies.

For this reason and because of their past history and present state of underdevelopment, there is greater affinity in the conditions and outlook of the peoples of Asia and Africa, than those of African and Europe. However we should not approach the problems of relations between peoples in this light, if we want to avoid creating deeper divisions in the world, and further upsetting the balance of universal society. Is it necessary to stress that these divisions are the concern of all peoples, rich and poor, all nations, strong or weak, all men, wealthy or in need?

2. Political independence

The extent of the movement for national liberation, which has suddenly brought rebirth to a whole continent and made it part of international life, bears witness to the volume and strength of this collective awareness. It is not by putting Angolan heads on bamboo stakes that Portuguese colonists – or for that matter colonialism in general – will stem the tide of this growing awareness. There would be too many heads to cut off for that. Actually, an important evolution in history is taking place, and its consequences direct and indirect, will increasingly influence the evolution of world society as a whole. Indeed, the liberation movement will modify the international structure more profoundly than did the two terrible world wars.

The colonial and semi-colonial countries, although containing the majority of the world's population, had only geographical existence. They appeared on the map, of course, but their straight-jacketed peoples were regarded as unimportant because they were limited and enslaved by others. In appearance they remained mute and motionless, but in fact the conviction that a struggle for freedom was necessary was stirring within them. Today, most of these people have won back their right to a free and dignified existence. The shameful racial segregation rampant in South Africa will change nothing; on the contrary, it sharpens the awareness of the African peoples and strengthens their character. It will harden them still more when the inevitable showdown with the Afrikaners, with their racist and reactionary views, forces the African peoples to face up to this problem. Steel is tempered by heat. Will not the same prove true of peoples? The more they are restrained and oppressed, the more able they become to fulfil their historic destiny. The more they are threatened in their liberty, their personality, their dignity, their hopes – in their very lives – the more powerfully they arm themselves for the battle to regain and keep their freedom and use their sovereignty in order to satisfy their needs and assure their survival and development.

Thus the struggle for independence, whatever the form, whatever the means, had just one meaning for the African peoples: to acquire the first tool to open the way for them to solve their problems as human beings fully conscious of their responsibilities. For anyone to imagine that everything is accomplished and that efforts can cease with independence (which in any case still remains to be consolidated in most of the African countries) is to close one's eyes to the human evidence, to contradict the evolution of history, and ignore the existence of poor nations which realize what injustices they have suffered and burn to exploit their hidden potentialities. The equilibrium to be thus attained is not one between antagonistic forces so much as a harmonization of the world-wide levels of development.

For us, the element of need prevails over more philosophical and even ideological factors; for the human needs of which man is conscious and which are part of his very being constitute the true motive forces of history. The intensity of this force is a function of the forces which hamper or combat it.

It is vain, then, to hope that Africa will evolve according to any specific form which might be imposed upon her contrary to her own wishes or understanding. She will evolve within her own authentic framework and in accordance with her own personality until her economic conditions lose their particular characteristics and become normal. It is futile to talk of "protecting" Africa, or to give her alms which will salve the conscience of some, blunt temporarily the awareness of others, and perpetuate inequalities between peoples by maintaining differences in their living conditions. And it is futile also to try to trace any one path that Africa must follow. Africa must be left free to follow her own historical path, starting from the imperatives of her destiny and taking into account the requirements of a fraternal and united world.

In other words, it is a question of affirming our "Africanness," that is to say our personality, without attempting to dress it up in Western or Eastern costume. What must be constructed harmoniously and rapidly is an Africa that is authentically African, Africa has her own needs, concepts and customs. She does not seek to deck herself out in borrowed clothing that does not fit.

This destiny, while presupposing the total disappearance of colonialism, the liquidation of imperialism and the establishment of a society free from privileges, also opened new and inspiring perspectives of justice, progress and universal peace. Need we recall that by holding onto their present privileges and technical superiority the highly developed nations are depriving themselves of the creative talent and productive capacity of hundreds of millions of people in the underdeveloped nations? Already the modern world's scientific conquests outgrew

the potentialities and resources of individual countries. More and more, the utilization of recently discovered scientific methods calls for the cooperation of several countries, indeed, of all countries together.

In view of this, it seems bitterly ironical that progress, upon which mankind's greater happiness depends, is hampered less by lack of knowledge than by the sealing off by certain selfish people of information about their scientific discoveries, experiments and achievements. As a result of their substituting the will to power for the will to progress, human happiness and the interests of nations are deliberately and irrevocably sacrificed. Paradoxically, it is in the name of safeguarding human happiness and the interests of peoples that men choose the perilous path of a military power, leading perhaps to the end of humanity.

So far as Africa is concerned, this situation leads to something that is tangible and easily grasped. Compared to other continents, Africa is relatively retarded. But to what is this backwardness attributable? To some natural inequality between black man and white? No! for there are black men who by their culture have an intrinsic value superior to that of certain white men. Hence, insofar as individual capacities are concerned there is no such thing as intellectual inequality among men, whatever their colour or race. Inequality exists solely in living conditions, as a result of the accidents of history, that is to say, of the political, economic and social conditions that have ruled, and still rule, the development of the different parts of the world. Some nations had their development hampered by their political system (as in European countries like Spain, Portugal or Greece), while in other countries it was foreign interventions (as in any country subject to direct and indirect foreign rule).

But is there inequality in the realm of intelligence. We say categorically, No! Is there any ethical disparity among the two social systems confronted here? Again we say, No! Africa is not backward in the moral and spiritual domain. In truth, the African is keenly aware of the difference between good and evil, of justice, of liberty, of solidarity, of the virtues of work and human charity, as well as of universal peace; he has the same sense of his responsibilities as do the inhabitants of Europe, America, Asia or Oceania. He has, with some slight variations, the same sense of values; hence we cannot consider that he is, even provisionally, backward either morally or spiritually. If there is inequality, then it lies only in economic conditions. Far from being an inherent defect, it is the consequence of the low level of scientific, technical and financial development of our countries. And although in these respects Africa is backward compared to other continents, she must not on that account underestimate her human personality, her economic, moral and cultural values, her spiritual force or the contribution she can make to world civilization.

In the past decade Africa has become well aware of her lag in material things and is eagerly seeking to attain the level of development of the highly industrialized countries.

When we analyse the ills that have beset the African, indeed the whole black race, we are obliged to admit at once that economic factors are what have favoured slavery, the deportation of our populations, racial discrimination, colonization, and today, neo-colonialism. Africa has been exploited and oppressed for economic motives; her legitimate desire for rehabilitation – social, moral, cultural – must be fulfilled by her economic development.

3. Economic independence

We of course know that the world today is interdependent, and Africa, which cannot live in isolation, does not intend to remain at the margin of this modern world. She thinks she is entitled to benefit from the experience of other nations as well as from the fruits of her own efforts. In turn, she must contribute actively to the creation of a world society in which each nation, while retaining its own personality, will be considered on an equal footing with the others and will, like them, take on its proper share of international responsibilities.

Africa has been carved up and divided. The evil of colonialism has not consisted just of exploitation and discrimination but of loss of liberty and seizure of sovereignty. Only when a people proclaims its independence, therefore, and exercises its sovereignty, can it put an end to every form of exploitation by establishing democratic institutions, creative initiatives and assuring freedom by social progress.

Colonialism's greatest misdeed was to have tried to strip us of our responsibility in conducting our own affairs and convince us that our civilisation was nothing less than savagery, thus giving us complexes which led to us being branded as irresponsible and lacking self-confidence. Our greatest victory then will not be the one we are winning over colonialism by securing independence but the victory we shall win over ourselves by freeing ourselves from the complexes of colonialism, proudly expressing Africa's authentic values and identifying ourselves thoroughly with them. Thus the African peoples will become fully conscious of their equality with other peoples.

The colonial powers had assimilated each of their colonies into their economy. The French colonies were an economic branch of the French economy, the British colonies were an extension of the economy of Great Britain. Between Guinea and Sierra Leone, between "French Guinea" and "Portuguese Guinea," there exist

common traditional bonds of custom, history and economy. Yet, no economic relations existed between them, for each was a tributary of the colonial power's market exclusivity.

We know that we must rebuild Africa. To win and proclaim a nation's independence but keep its old structures is to plough a field but not sow it with grain for a harvest. Africa's political independence is a means which must be used to create and develop the new African economy. Our continent possesses tremendous reserves of raw materials and they, together with its potential sources of power, give it excellent conditions for industrialization. That is why, while it would be unrealistic and irrational to think of associating the African nations with the European Common Market, or any other form of economic monopoly, it is to be hoped that an African Common Market will be organized which eventually can co-operate on a basis of equality and solidarity with other economic zones.

African unity is no more an end in itself than was independence. It is simply a means of development, a force for inter-African co-operation. It is indispensable because of the unjust nature of the relationship between the underdeveloped African nations and the economically strong nations. The equality of this relationship must be improved in order to overcome the social inequalities and differentiations in the present levels of development throughout the world. The highly developed nations have economic relations among themselves either of co-operation or of competition. But their relations with the underdeveloped nations are those of exploitation, of economic domination. The straightforward colonial exploitation of former days is being succeeded by exploitation by international monopolies, and has a tendency to become permanent. Paradoxically, it is the underdeveloped nation, exporting raw materials and crude products, which contribute an important share of the cost of the social improvements from which workers in the fully developed countries benefit.

The nature of our economic relations on the world market can be easily illustrated. In the period 1957 to 1961, the exchange value of raw materials and crude products in relation to industrial products fell 34 per cent, although from 1955 to 1957 this rate had already fallen 50 per cent in relation to the 1948 market. The extent of the decline on the international market is shown by the following statistics, recently published in an international review:

1. Immediately after the war the average per capita income in the U.S.A. was 1,000 dollars per annum, while in the underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America it was 100 dollars. Fifteen years later in the United States it was 2,500 dollars, and in the underdeveloped countries barely 150 dollars. Thus, while in the most developed part of the world the average

income was ten times larger than that of the underdeveloped countries, which represent the vast majority of the world territory and population, this difference has risen up to seventeen times.

2. Since the war, the world average per capita production of food has increased by 13 per cent. But in Africa the production per capita has fallen by 2 per cent, in Latin America it has increased by 2 per cent, in Latin America it has increased by 2 per cent, and in developed Western Europe by 21 per cent.
3. Immediately after the second World War the underdeveloped countries' participation in world trade exchange was 38 per cent. However, by 1953 its share was reduced to 36 per cent, in 1959 to 31 per cent and in 1961 to 29 per cent.
4. In the course of the last ten years alone the prices of industrial goods in international trade have increased by 24 per cent, while the prices of raw materials have fallen by 5 per cent. In other words, the underdeveloped countries exporting raw materials were, towards the end of the fifties, purchasing one third less industrial goods for a determined quantity of raw materials, as compared with ten years earlier.

In the light of these circumstances it is easy to understand that the economic unity and monetary independence of Africa do not signify, as has been naively suggested, that Guinea will be permitted to sell its coffee to the Ivory Coast, its palm-kernel to Dahomey, and its bauxite to Ghana. It signifies that, as Africa enters the international market as a producer, all steps must be taken to establish a fair relationship in the active forces which dominate international trade, replacing the position of dependence to which the underdeveloped nations are subjected now.

The mere fact that there are cries of alarm about the production of coffee, cocoa or peanuts, while there is silence about the products for which demand is increasingly active but whose prices remain stable, such as diamonds, gold, oil, radioactive ores, zinc and copper, illustrates the mercantile nature of the economic relations between the highly developed nations and the nations producing raw materials. In 1957, the total tax on coffee imported into France was 71 per cent of its import values; it was 72 per cent in Germany and 73 per cent in Italy. Was it really a question of protectionist measures in the case of coffee, or of its discriminatory taxation? It is a fact that in this same period the price of gold was lower on the French market than it was, for instance, at Siguiry in Guinea, as a result of surtaxes designed to prevent its sale locally.

Actually, the difficulties appearing within the European Common Market with regard to the renewal of Association Agreements entered into by certain African nations prove that it is not the form of the economic relations that must change, but their very nature.

Here, as in other realms, the interests of the African peoples are one, and the awareness of this unity is rapidly becoming more and more explicit. The African nations are realizing that in order to solve their urgent social problems they must speed up the transformation of their trade economy; and if this is to be done through industrialization, it cannot be done within the limits of our national micro-economies. But unconditional integration into a multi-national market consisting of highly developed and underdeveloped nations negates the possibility of industrial development in advance; it could only be the association of horse and rider. If they are to complement each other economically, the development of all associated nations must be carried out according to their united needs and common interests. Any concept which imposes implicitly and *a priori* a particular orientation and framework on the development of the various nations cannot work, for it does not bring a radical solution to the nature of the economic relationships involved or to the general problems facing integrated human communities. The leaders of the European Economic Community seem not to be aware of all this, at least as far as Africa is concerned, and make no secret of their desire to achieve a political community of Europe which cannot be reconciled with Africa's desire for political independence; but Africa remains as grimly hostile as ever to the divisions of Africa which began with the Congress of Berlin in 1885.

4. African unity

The unity so much desired by all Africans will not be achieved around any one man or any one nation but around a concrete programme, however minimal. The rules of the union must favour and reinforce generally accepted concepts: equality of all nations, large or small; fraternal solidarity in their relationships; the common use of certain resources, and respect for the character and institutions of each state. Not only must there be no interference in the internal affairs of any state by another, but each must help to solve each other's problems. If we do not rapidly achieve a framework of solidarity, permitting the peaceful evolution of our countries, we risk seeing the cold war enter Africa and divide the African states into antagonistic forces and blocs, jeopardizing their whole future in common.

The evolution of our countries in peace and harmony requires a high degree of co-operation. We have always thought that Africa should be considered like a human body: when a finger is cut off, the whole body suffers. The growing awareness that we all share the same future must make us increase our efforts for this co-operation, for solidarity, and for active and conscious African participation in worldwide progress.

When we speak, furthermore, of rehabilitating the African Man, we do not indulge in a racist doctrine but act in accord with an historical and moral imperative. We have suffered too much from the malice and scorn of others. We must act so that they will respect us in future and this we shall do by respecting ourselves and honestly and competently exercising our responsibilities. It is a problem of human dignity and conscience.

Some have claimed to see political antagonism in the formation of various African groupings. Actually these were the first concrete manifestations of unity, and were inspired by human and historical necessity. Scepticism notwithstanding, the tendency towards unity will increase. Political choices which do not correspond to the needs and aspirations of our people – and it is important that this is understood – will inevitably fail.

As for what face a united Africa will wear, whatever the choices she makes in her orientation, it will not be turned either against the East or against the West. It will be above all and essentially directed towards the emancipation and progress of Africa and her peoples. In our struggle for freedom there is no room for negative choices, but only for positive thought and constructive action. What will be destroyed or defeated in this struggle are those things that historical necessities, human needs and the forces of progress consign to destruction and oblivion.

5. Non-alignment

To attempt to interpret Africa's behaviour in terms of capitalism or Communism is to ignore the fundamental fact that Africa's present conditions correspond neither to the essentials of capitalism nor those for building up Communism, as generally conceived.

Africa's way is the way of peaceful revolution, in which the morality of an action counts much more than its form and conditions. Some may believe socialism corresponds best to the aims of the African revolution, while others suppose it is preferable, despite the lack of national capital, to espouse capitalistic principles; in the last analysis it is for our people to decide their own fate, since it is they who are called on to make the sacrifices and the creative efforts necessary to ensure Africa's development. Their awareness is sufficiently keen to enable them to choose the way they want to go.

In deciding these matters our people will take account of the realities of the twentieth century; the tremendous possibilities of future human achievement as well as the knowledge, experience and discoveries accumulated in the course of the past centuries. Their commitment will correspond to their hope of future benefits.

It will be one which makes a real contribution to general progress in peace and human happiness.

African neutralism, then, is not shameful indifference, a sort of political demobilization. On the contrary, it is the expression of a lively faith in a happy future for mankind. It is something active, a participating force, an active agent in the struggle for the achievement of a world society-emancipated, fraternal and united. Let us hope that the highly developed nations and peoples can understand this historical movement in its universal significance and that they will take full part in it, in the conscious desire to help build a free and prosperous Africa in a world of peace and brotherhood.

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